Virtual Gateway
Common Intake Newsletter

February 2009

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Important Changes to the Supplemental Nutrition Assistance Program "SNAP"
(Formerly the Food Stamp Program)

Name Change

The name of the Food Stamp Program has changed to Supplemental Nutrition Assistance Program or SNAP. Nothing has changed for clients, providers or retailers, and the process remains the same—only the name is different.

There are three major reasons for the name change:

(1) Food stamp coupons no longer exist. All states now issue SNAP benefits electronically through the EBT system! The new name reflects the modernization of the program.

(2) The new name highlights that SNAP is a nutrition benefit. It is a critical nutritional support for low income individuals and families in Massachusetts and across the country. SNAP benefits are the first line of defense against hunger in the United States.

(3) SNAP benefits are a *supplement* to other income and are not intended to provide the full food budget for eligible households.

While the name change is effective immediately, as we transition to SNAP you will see some client forms, brochures, and notices with the new name and others will still refer to the Food Stamp Program. The Virtual Gateway Common Intake Food Stamp Application will continue to use the Food Stamp Program name.

New SNAP Contact Information

In our continued effort to improve customer service and client access to this critical benefit, the numbers for providers to call for SNAP information have changed:

Recipient Services
800-445-6604 or 617-348-5502
TTY 888-448-7695 or 617-348-5599

The recipient services line has been expanded to accept calls regarding pending applications. Once a SNAP/FS application is received, the client is considered a recipient of DTA for questions regarding benefits eligibility.

Important: Be prepared to fax a release form allowing you to speak with DTA on behalf of your client to Recipient Services.

SNAP / Food Stamp Benefits Hotline
1-866-950-FOOD

The SNAP/Food Stamp Benefits Hotline responds to general inquiries about SNAP, gives information about the application process, and provides eligibility screenings.

SNAP Denial Reason Now Available

The Virtual Gateway Common Intake application provides the status of SNAP applications including Pending, Approved, Denied, or Closed. Effective immediately, you will also see the reason, should the application be denied. For example:

➢ If an application fails either financial or non-financial eligibility requirements, the application will be denied. Denial reasons are very specific to the client situation. Some examples include: Your household income exceeds the limits for the household

size; You are an ineligible non-citizen, etc.

➢ If an applicant fails to comply with any part of the application process, the application will be denied for the following administrative reasons:

(1) When an application is denied due to failure to complete the application process this means the client has not had the mandatory application interview. The applicant must reapply for SNAP benefits. The provider may want to help the client submit a new application and verifications.

(2) When an application is denied due to failure to submit required verifications, the client has thirty (30) additional days to provide any missing proofs. The provider may want to help the client to gather missing items. Once missing verifications are received SNAP benefits will be approved.

MassHealth, Commonwealth Care, Health Safety Net Members to Use the Virtual Gateway to Access Case Information

MassHealth, Commonwealth Care and Health Safety Net members will soon be able to use the Virtual Gateway to view their case status online and to update certain information about themselves and/or household on file with MassHealth without having to call a MassHealth office. In addition, Commonwealth Care members with minimal changes to their cases will be able to use the Virtual Gateway to submit their annual eligibility reviews online, rather than using a paper form.

Using the Virtual Gateway's My Account Page (MAP), a member will soon be able to view in real time and on a single screen their current status if they are receiving health-assistance benefits such as MassHealth, Commonwealth Care, Health Safety Net, Children's Medical Security Plan, or Healthy Start. They will be able to quickly access the following types of information:

➢ Application status (e.g., approved, pending, closed)
➢ Key eligibility dates (e.g., determination date)
➢ Benefit information (e.g., category, status, effective dates)
➢ Outstanding items needed to finalize their application
➢ Examples of acceptable forms of verifications that will satisfy application requirements
➢ Eligibility notices that have been sent to them or their household

In addition, members will be able to use the Gateway's "Change Form" feature to update, edit, or delete the following information electronically:

➢ Homeless status
➢ Residential address
➢ Mailing address
➢ Phone number
➢ Pregnancy status
➢ Race and Ethnicity

Commonwealth Care members with minimal changes to their cases will soon be able to use the Gateway's Streamlined Renewals ("SLR") function to fulfill their annual review requirement online. This new feature will make the annual review process easier and more efficient for them and help ensure continuity of coverage where applicable.

Be sure to stay tuned for more details about this exciting development!

Common Intake Job Aids Get a Face Lift!

We've been working hard to update the Common Intake job aids to ensure that they are providing you with the most up-to-date steps and information for submitting online applications. We invite you to visit us at www.mass.gov/vg/commonintake and take a look!